

Client Satisfaction of Case Management Services

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Abstract

Research with clients receiving services from their case manager through the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children reveal that the majority of them feel as though they are satisfied with the services they receive. The primary purpose of this study was to explore whether or not clients were satisfied with the quality of services that they receive from their case manager. Ten participants were surveyed regarding their satisfaction. These findings are vital to the specific case manager in assessing the quality of services that are provided. However, future studies should include statewide assessments of each child welfare system in the United States to determine if they are effective and what can be done to improve them.

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Introduction

An estimated 896,000 children across the country were victims of abuse or neglect in 2002, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The statistics indicate about 12.3 out of every 1,000 children were victims of abuse or neglect (www.hhs.gov). These statistics do not reflect the number of children that suffered from abuse or neglect that were not reported. All of these children were served by the Child Protective Services (CPS) agency in their state. State agencies that offer CPS services are continuously under fire for many different reasons. However, although there is continuous controversy regarding these agencies, very little research is available regarding their effectiveness in each state and few recommendations for improvement are available.

Most current research within the CPS field focuses on the many different barriers in social work. These barriers however are what lead to the problems that many clients in CPS agencies face. For example, in CPS agencies there are high caseloads, few resources, high turnover rates, incompetence, inadequate training, and stringent federal laws that all affect the workers within the agency and that in turn influences the satisfaction of clients. High turnover rates in CPS agencies have been hindering the field for years and it has some very lasting effects. It continues to be a challenge for all CPS agencies. A national study completed in the 1980's estimated an 8% rate of attrition for workers nationwide (Graef & Hill, 2000). Sometimes the effects of attrition can be detrimental such as someone dying because a worker had not made a

home visit in several months and did not know the person was being physically abused or severely neglected.

In an article by Kapp & Propp (2002), the viewpoints of clients that have children in foster care is explored. It is important to remember though that although CPS deals with foster children, there are more open cases on children that remain in the home than cases with children in foster care, and they are where the prevention starts. This is why it is imperative that clients are receiving the services that they need and that they are satisfied with those services. This article describes a series of focus group interviews that include parents who have kids in the foster system. The interviews were used to elicit information of their perceived treatment as clients within the foster care system. Eight focus groups were conducted statewide at four different sites. The names of all the participants were provided by the state and/or contract providers. Some of the issues involved in the research were availability and accessibility. Relating this back to the first article, these were both connected to a high turnover rate at the agency. This issue was also frequently discussed amongst the focus groups as well as worker overload. Other issues included respect, parent involvement, and rights. Many of the groups felt as though the satisfaction survey that they were given was unable to capture their true feeling towards the system. Information gathered by these groups was informative in two ways. One was that it provided information on how to revise and develop the client satisfaction surveying instrument and two was that it provided general suggestions and insight into how to provide better outreach and respond to families in the foster care system. One of the outcomes was that the groups wanted a way to voice their concerns on a regular basis such as a 1-800 number or a customer service department.

Although the articles do not give the results of client satisfaction research, they all play a role in the satisfaction of clientele. Client services are all directly or indirectly related to high turnover and large caseloads among other factors. All of these factors trickle down to clients and their families. Further research should be done in each state to determine if their clients are receiving the services that they need by their case managers. Not all of these factors are unavoidable. Some of the services provided to clients can be changed with help from the professionals. The purpose of this study was to advise the child welfare system of how to assess the services they provide on a regular basis. However, agencies should initially develop a research project to get a comprehensive view of what the issues are and how they can be improved upon.

This project attempted to assess the satisfaction of one specific CPS case manager's clientele. The information obtained by the project will be used to adjust service delivery to meet the needs of present and future clients of this worker to best of their ability. The findings of this study will contribute to more effective case management and enhancement of the safety and well-being of families that are being served. The research question addressed in this program evaluation is: Are the clients satisfied with the quality of services that have been provided to them?

Methods

The sample size was composed of ten individuals that have an ongoing case with CPS due to neglect or because their child has committed a status offense. The sample was taken from one specific case manager that has a caseload of eighteen families. The sample was chosen by selecting families that have had an open case for six months or longer. The study had a 100% response rate. Surveying instruments were mailed to the ten individuals along with the consent

preamble that did not require a signature. The participants were asked to circle the most correct answer. The survey included a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the survey to the investigator to maintain confidentiality and to prevent coercion.

The demographics of the participants were diverse in many areas except for gender. This is due to the lack of many male clients. Forty percent of the participants were African American and the rest were Caucasian (Figure 3). All of the participants have had an open case for over six months, with the majority having had an open case for 9 months or more. Nine of the cases were open due to neglect and one was open for juvenile services. One male was involved in the study, while the others were female. The mean age of the participants is 30.56. Seventy percent of the participants are married. Surveys were not given to the participants' spouses for various reasons including separation (by choice or due to incarceration) or because the spouse was not a biological parent of the children involved.

This was a quantitative study using an AB research design. The survey consisted of ten statements that utilized the Likert Scale for measurement.. Participants had the choice of rating their answers from one to four, with one being strongly disagree and four being strongly agree. There was not a neutral option to choose. All of the participants answered every question. There was not an option for additional comments. The clients are the dependent variable and the independent variables are the services they receive. The questions are based on characteristics of the case manager and do not reflect the policies of the agency in which the case manager works. The answers to the questions were analyzed using the SPSS program. Descriptive and frequency statistics were used to interpret the data (Figures 1 & 2).

Results

The first statement on the survey was “My case manager is often available when I call. Please see Figure 4. Sixty percent of the participants either agree or strongly agree with this statement and the same percentage agree with the next statement of “My case manager return calls in a timely manner”. Overwhelmingly, nine out of ten participants felt that their case manager meets with them often enough to meet their needs. Ninety percent also agreed or strongly agreed that their case manager is knowledgeable, compared to one person who disagreed. Sixty percent also agreed that their case manager listens and is concerned about their family and the same amount agreed that they had input on their case plan and that they are treated with respect. To the statement “I feel that my case manager treats me with respect”, six out of ten respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. All of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their case manager protects their confidential information. The results according to direct demographic information are not known due to the instrument not assessing this information. Due to the small sample size, such information on the survey could have revealed identification.

Discussion

It appears that overall, clients are satisfied with the quality of services that they receive. Please refer to Figure 1 for results of all of the statements. The one statement that every participant agreed or strongly agreed with was “I feel that my case manager protects my confidential information”. There was also primarily positive feedback on the case manager’s knowledge. This suggests that the clients have some trust in their case manager, regardless of their satisfaction with other services. The majority of the clients had a positive answer for every question, whether they agreed or strongly agreed. The responses were fairly consistent throughout with the majority of the answers rating 60% for agree and/or strongly agree. The

largest amount of people that did not agree with statements was four at the most. This amount appeared on six of the ten statements with either a disagree or strongly disagree response. The majority also felt that having a case manager was beneficial to them and felt as though their case manager meets with them often enough to meet their needs. Even though there are few studies that research client satisfaction in the CPS field, this study was generally in line with the literature because the areas that participants appeared to be most dissatisfied with were the areas that could be affected by worker overload such as availability.

Although it appears as though the clients were generally satisfied with the services they receive, there are limitations to the findings of this study. The sample for this study was very small and the study was only directed towards one case manager. The results of this study could not be used to make generalizations about the whole system or even one office. The results may have also been skewed due to clients responding either to resentment towards worker or because they wanted to please their worker, although the surveys were confidential. Clients that have children in foster care may have rated lower because of anger that their children are in care but on the other hand, they may have rated higher hoping that they might get their children back. There are also some respondents that may really like their case manager and may have chose the highest on each one simply because they wanted a way to praise their case manager. Although the answers were confidential, some clients may have had not taken that into consideration when choosing a response. There may have also been some participants that were unable to understand a statement or may have been confused when choosing an answer. The statements that the participants measured were also only factors the case manager could control. The study did not measure other factors that could contribute to the client's dissatisfaction of services that they receive. There also were not any opportunities to elaborate on answers or choose a neutral

option. Respondents may have felt pressured to choose a particular answer because there was not any other option.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This was a small-scale study to inform one case manager of clients views of how they perceive their services. The case manager can use the results to adjust services to accommodate clients as best as they are able. Due to the confidentiality, it will be difficult to meet each client's needs individually because the case manager is unaware of which areas need to be worked on most for each client. This study's implications for social work is that it shows how important it is for all case managers in the CPS field to have the opportunity to evaluate their work so that they can adjust accordingly.

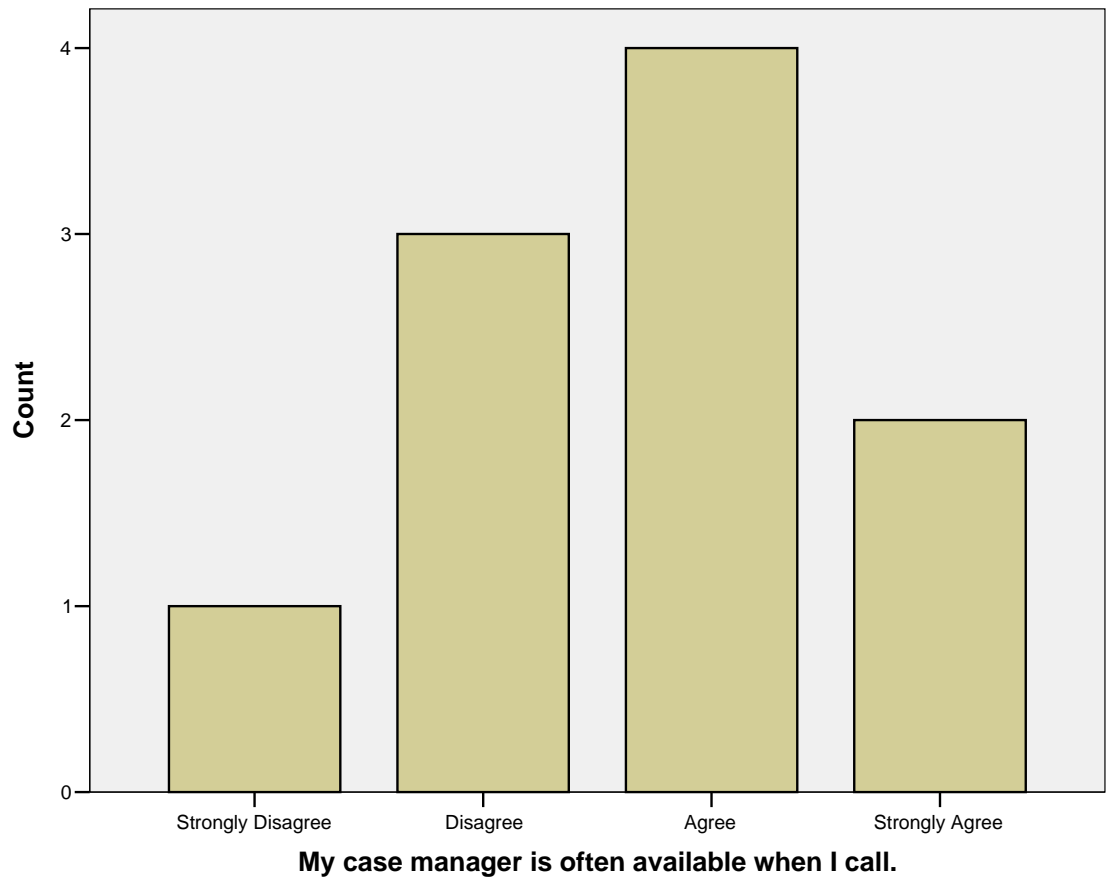
Recommendations for future studies include devising a research project that will evaluate child welfare systems in each state. The research should be implemented by each separate state on their own system. The project should include assessing each case manager by taking a sample from everyone's caseload. This project should assess different areas of satisfaction among clients including areas that are affected by policy, not only areas that are worker-related. Then each state should implement a program improvement plan after analyzing the results. On the other hand, research should also be completed on the federal level so that factors that are related to policies such as the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) can be evaluated as well. It would be important to have personal interviews for this research because of all of the different factors that will affect the outcome, such as families that have children in foster care. After an improvement plan is created and implemented, a follow-up study should take place. The child welfare system in the United States is forever changing and the different issues that affect families are changing as well. These issues change so rapidly that the social work profession has failed to keep up. The

child welfare system cannot continue to remain where it's at if improvements are expected. This starts with families, but when the family is struggling, it is up to the social work profession to foster change and if states continue to fail to recognize this, children will not the ability achieve safety, permanency, or well-being.

References

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Figure 4



Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
My case manager is often available when I call.	2.70	.949	10
My case manager returns calls in a timely manner.	2.90	.876	10
I feel that my case manager meets with me often enough to meet my needs	3.40	.699	10
I feel that my case manager is knowledgeable.	3.40	.699	10
I feel that my case manager listens and is concerned about my family.	3.20	1.033	10
My case manager asked for my input for my case plan.	2.80	.789	10
My case manager treats me with respect.	3.10	.994	10
I feel that my case manager advocates for me and my family.	3.00	.943	10
I feel that my case manager protects my confidential information.	3.60	.516	10
I feel that having a case manager is a benefit for me.	2.90	.994	10